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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Nyla Wisecup, Age 85, Des Moines, IA
Meredith Ferguson
Nyla's apartment, Des Moines, IA
6-28-12**

Meredith Ferguson: This is Meredith Ferguson and I'm interviewing Nyla Wisecup. The date is June 28, 2012. The interview is taking place at Nyla's apartment in Des Moines,

Iowa and the time is about 10:15 in the morning. Nyla, could you please state your full name and your age.

Nyla Wisecup: Nyla Genevieve Wisecup and my age is May 11, 1927, which would be 85 years ago; May 11 of 1927.

Ferguson: Okay, thank you. The purpose of this interview is that it will become part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa Oral History Project. Nyla, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: Thank you. Okay, just a few basic questions on your background. Where were you born and raised?

Wisecup: I was born in Marcy Township in Boone County, Iowa.

Ferguson: Okay, you grew up there? Is that where you went to high school?

Wisecup: I was 4-years-old when my folks moved 14 miles northeast of Boone on a farm, and that's where we lived on about 160 acres for better than 30 years 'till all of my siblings were graduated from high school. And I went to the country school through the eighth grade, kindergarten through eight; walked two miles over and two miles back.

Ferguson: Oh wow!

Wisecup: And then I went to Story City high school, which was like nine miles straight east of where we lived. And the bus driver for the Story City school buses was going into the war and he wanted Story City to buy the buses. And they didn't think they needed the country kids, and so Stanhope was eight miles straight north of where my folks lived. So I went to Stanhope the last three years of my high school days. And there were times when I had to walk a little better than a mile out to, well, it was 60 at that time, now its highway 17, to catch the bus. The bus didn't leave the highway. Anybody that wanted to go had to meet the bus because it was war time. My other brothers and sisters went back to Story City and finished.

Ferguson: How many brothers and sisters did you have? Were you the youngest?

Wisecup: I have five sisters and two brothers. My oldest sister, Eunice, and my next sister older than I is Doris, and I'm third to the oldest. And then I have Maxine and Joann, and then two brothers, Raymond and George, and then the youngest sister, Helen, is the only one that's left; 15 years younger than I am, up in Boone County.

Ferguson: Okay. What is the cause of your blindness, and at what age did it really start to set in?

Wisecup: Okay. If you really want to know the name of it it's a lack of iris, but there is a medical name for it. And I do have it down, but not here. But I do have it in my purse if you need it.

Ferguson: Oh, that's okay.

Wisecup: Okay. My father also had the same disease, and about when you're 40, or so, you start to lose your sight. I mean, he wasn't driving by that time. After I was out of school, why there were younger ones and I... In high school both the superintendant and the principal thought I needed to go to college to either be a Home Ec. teacher or Math teacher. But I didn't have the money, and my two older sisters both went to...got a quarter of college, and both taught school. Well, I guess I was kind of at home just helping, kind of trying to decide what to do. And my dad's neighbor, that they worked back and forth on the farm, his daughter was going to have her second child. So he thought I could go and take care of little Billy while his mother was in the hospital; and take care of him, and do the cooking, and so on. So then, of course, that just started by mouth this fellow's, Bill, that's who it was, the father. But, then Arlow and Cliff, I helped with their children and little by little it just went on and on.

Ferguson: So you became like a nanny?

Wisecup: Yes. Hired girl then, but yeah, like a nanny. And then I had glaucoma in my right eye, and had it removed in fall of '60. And the people that I'd been helping thought I needed more rest, but well, and the neighbors half a mile north of us had a relative in Ames. He had lost his wife. They saved the baby and he had a 2-year-old daughter, so I went there for two weeks. I didn't want... When the baby came in January, I didn't want to do that. I always just survived 'till the mother came home, and then she bossed and told me

where and what to do. And I didn't want to go into a...try and raise a baby, because I couldn't really see very good at that time.

Ferguson: And how old were you about then?

Wisecup: About 38 maybe, roughly.

Ferguson: Yeah, 38. And had you had vision problems before, while you were growing up, or is that when it really started to...

Wisecup: No, no. I have three sisters that have the same eye problem. But we all went through high school with some blackboard work, or like, a three, and an eight, and a five in a fraction if it wasn't printed very dark. But we all went through...they wanted us to go to Vinton, but we didn't. We needed to stay home and work on the farm; five girls ahead of two boys, we had to. We were boys.

Ferguson: Was that your decision, or did your parents want you to go to Vinton? Or did they say that you needed to stay home?

Wisecup: No, the county nurse thought we needed to go. No, we went to Dr. Uptegraff and he says to stay home, and treat them as though they're normal kids. And we stayed at...we had an Aladdin lamp to help with homework, and so on, and we all stayed at home.

Ferguson: So other than, like, the occasional blackboard problems, your vision didn't really affect your normal day to day life?

Wisecup: No.

Ferguson: You did the same kind of chores, and like you said, you were like a boy on the farm?

Wisecup: Made hey, and picked corn, and chopped. Yes, indeed, big time.

So then I went to the motherless home for two weeks. And they said, "Well, why don't you just stay for the winter? The little girl's just two; she won't be outside." So, I ended up staying five years.

Ferguson: And the motherless home, is that like an orphanage or...

Wisecup: She died, and so then he had a house.

Ferguson: Oh okay, yes.

Wisecup: And he was at Iowa State in the transportation with the college. And so, then I just took care of those two. And he went off to work, and I had my Braille while I was up there, because the little girl wanted me to read books to her. Well, I told the story about the little red hen and so on, but she knew that wasn't right. So I thought it's time for me to do...back then the Iowa Commission for the Blind had Ruth Brackney. She was the only one for the state of Iowa. And

she'd come every six weeks, maybe, two months. But you can learn Braille on your own.

Ferguson: Yeah, I've heard several stories where, men and women, they learn Braille in their homes with a little guidance.

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: So were you... This was before you went to the orientation center right?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: So you said that you had learned Braille before then. Did you know any other skills along with the Braille? Did you know any cane travel or...?

Wisecup: No. I should have had before that. I hardly could see when I was up in Ames.

Ferguson: Okay, so at what point did you go to the orientation center here in Des Moines?

Wisecup: In April of '64.

Ferguson: 1964. Okay. And what drove you to go to the orientation center? At what point did you...

Wisecup: Two things, my mother had to drive for my dad, because he couldn't see anymore, at all. So my sister, older next to me, had received her four-year Masters degree and

went off to Germany to teach the government children in Stuttgart, and I missed her dearly. She and I were the ones that were not married, and I got to go with her sometimes to the teacher things, you know, social part. I missed her. I missed her deeply, and I decided it was time for me to get my independence if I could. And the two children were going to be in school all day, you know, the next fall. I really intended to stay the summer, but the opening came in April and it was time to go.

Ferguson: Okay, so just to recap so I have the story. You'd been living with your parents, with your folks, and had been, kind of, being a nanny to various families around the county. And then you reached a point where you wanted a little more independence. So, you heard about the orientation center. How did you hear about the orientation center then?

Wisecup: There was a blind person here, Kay Bowen, and her sister lived in Ames. And so, I kind of got acquainted with her just on the phone, because she helped me then, kind of, with Braille sometimes if the teacher didn't come around. And the neighbors to the fellow that I was, Edward Moore...she thought it was time for me to go, too. So, I mean, there were some other issues. But she helped me write a letter to Mr. Jernigan, and then I came down to look and I told my folks about it finally. And they came down and thought it looked like it was great.

Ferguson: Okay, so you had had some interaction with the Commission before then. Is that who taught you Braille?

Wisecup: No.

Ferguson: Did you have another...was the teacher from some place else?

Wisecup: The teacher was from the Commission. I said her name a while ago; Brackney, Ruth Brackney.

Ferguson: Yes.

Wisecup: She was an elderly-like lady and she was blind. And she had a driver and he sat in the car. He never came in; went to the mall or whatever. She would come in and we'd have like we're having today, and we'd just talk about it. She'd help me over the hump, and then you'd just do it on your own again until you get stuck. Like Europe, I couldn't understand Europe to save my soul because I had been away from the print for quite a while, and wasn't reading so...

Ferguson: So did you have problems with print while you were in school, or at what age did it really become difficult for you to read print?

Wisecup: Oh, by the time I was 25/30 years I put my recipes in big, black pencil.

Ferguson: And is that when you started to learn Braille, or was it a few years later?

Wisecup: The Braille was later than then. The Braille came in 19, about 60, when I went to the motherless home.

Ferguson: Did Ruth Brackney, did she come to you or did you get her name from someone and contacted her for help?

Wisecup: Well, probably through this Kay Bowen's sister, Ruth, in Ames. I don't remember for sure, but I think so.

Ferguson: She contacted you?

Wisecup: She came to the place where I was living at the live-in home, yes, with the two children. And so, she saw the two children, you know.

Ferguson: I wanted to ask you about, because you've been caring for children. Obviously, people still asked you to care for their children, did they know that you had vision problems, or did it affect anything at all in your day to day life?

Wisecup: This fellow, that when I went to stay there, they knew that I'd been helping other people. And his parents were a big, big help to me. But the two neighbors on each side of his place were, too. It was fine. I grew up in a, "You don't wait to say it three or four times and then expect to do it; you do it."

Ferguson: Yeah. So nobody really thought anything of it to ask you to care for their children?

Wisecup: No.

Ferguson: They knew that it would be...they'd be well cared for.

Wisecup: Yes, I loved them as my own.

Ferguson: Okay.

Wisecup: Any of them. And I had a good many of them.

Ferguson: Do you know, kind of, roughly how many families you helped out; too many to recall? (Laughter)

Wisecup: I could say ten, twelve just right off, but there were more than that. The children were always good. You loved them. And anyway, if they were mine sometimes I might have paddled their bottom, but they weren't mine so you find another way.

Ferguson: And you mentioned it was you and just another sister that were unmarried?

Wisecup: Yes, Doris.

Ferguson: Were you the only one living at home, or were you both living at home?

15:00

Wisecup: Well, she was teaching school. She wasn't living at home. She was living in Boone. She taught country school for a while, and then she went into Boone and stayed with a friend that we had known. I think I was eight years old when I knew that family, and she had a room there with them. And then, of course, she took a leave of absence from Boone for

two years and went over, and came back for three or four more years, and then went back for three more years. She had five years overseas. That's when I found that I needed to become more independent, if possible.

Ferguson: Well, let's kind of get into when you entered the orientation center at the Commission. It was in April of 1964. And so, I just kind of wanted to see if there was anything in particular that you wanted to talk about right away, or I can just, kind of, ask some questions that I have.

Wisecup: Okay, a couple of things if I may.

Ferguson: Yeah, certainly!

Wisecup: Of course, I don't know how it is now, but you had to stay a month without having really any contact with your family on purpose. And that was fine. So I was going home for Mother's Day. And my birthday, May, then it would be a month, you know. So I talked to the Home Ec. teacher, Ruth Schrader. And so, she and I had a secret. I thought I didn't want her to tell anybody that I was going to bring brownies back for my birthday, because everybody had been so good to me. I had had a bad cold, and part of that was just the strain of new surroundings. But they were good to me, and so I thought I would bring brownies down because I liked to make brownies. And so, that was fine. So I came in with my brownies when I came back, and so different ones were talking about a sack lunch. I said, "Nobody told me we needed a sack lunch." Anyway, we went down to Ewing Park, I think. It is on the south side, where they have lilacs, for my birthday. And, of course, I got all kinds of things, you

know. Oh, they had a hamburger with, oh, spongy hamburger, and a hotdog that wasn't a hotdog, and pop, and I don't know, they brought me all kinds of lunch. And anyway, they finally did give me a good sack lunch. And we forgot Ruth Schrader. We had to go back and get her, and the coffee, and the brownies. (Laughter) So that I kind of remember; that was a big thing for me. Anyway, I thought there was one other. I can't remember the other thing right now.

Ferguson: Oh, that's okay. So you mentioned earlier coming into the orientation center. You had to write a letter to Jernigan?

Wisecup: Before I came in, asking about the...

Ferguson: Before you came in?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: And you mentioned was there a waiting list?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: How long did you have to wait?

Wisecup: I don't really know. I know mine came up in April, so I would have waited 'till the fall; 'till after the children were in school.

Ferguson: Sure okay. How many other students were...do you remember how many other students there were in the orientation center?

Wisecup: Oh, I'm not sure, like in April all the while I was there, we were pushing the seams because we had guests from different countries and so on; because at that time they had the two guest rooms up on the fifth floor, and they used those. There was a fellow from Germany; I can't remember. And there was a Fau-Shan, I think, something like that anyway, from Japan. Her dad, I think, was a doctor. She came as a guest. I don't remember how long she stayed, but later she came back as a guest. And oh, she came back later as a student. But this time, you know, we treated her as a guest at one time, but when you come in as a student...

Ferguson: It's different! (Laughter)

Wisecup: And that was a ball game. Oh, she was nice, but she thought she was going to be treated the same, is what I'm getting at.

Ferguson: Oh, yes. While you were there was it just those two overseas guests that you can remember, or were there others?

Wisecup: No, I think there were others, but I'm not sure. We were very, you know, we were filled up.

Ferguson: Sure.

Wisecup: We were filled up, but then at that time, you know, we were still growing, so to speak.

Ferguson: About the guests from Germany and Japan, do you know, did they come just to see the orientation center, or were they visiting the Commission in general?

Wisecup: I suspect in general; to go back home, I think. Only then, that one gal did come as a student, but to go back home then.

Ferguson: Okay, so they had heard about the program.

Wisecup: They had been to the national convention, and so on. We offered...

Ferguson: The National Federation of the Blind?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: Is it that national convention?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: And that's how they heard about Jernigan and the program?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: Okay. I just want to...I'm curious as to how they heard about it, and how they came here to Des Moines.

Wisecup: Oh, it was interesting. I loved every bit of it. And of course, now they don't have Home Ec. Well, I've never been in to the kitchens. At one time, when I tried to have a tour I just got to the living room. But I don't know when they changed it, but there was one...maybe you want to do that later. There was one thing I wish, and think they need to go back to. They need a...we used to have a Home Ec....an apartment. There was the kitchen, and then the fellows that were in shop when I was there, built that kitchen. And then there was a washer and dryer between, and then there was a big living room, big living room with a great big table from Madison; the prisoners built it.

Ferguson: Oh, yes.

Wisecup: And then there was a bedroom with two twin beds and a bathroom. That was the Home Ec. apartment.

Ferguson: So you're...it was an actual apartment with all those things?

Wisecup: Yes. And I'm sorry that they ever gave that up big time, because the Home Ec teacher, yeah she was the Home Ec. teacher, but underneath of that was philosophy big time. We'd sit around that kitchen table, that dining room table, with coffee and somebody would come in. Oh, they'd have trouble at home or walking; their travel...they'd have trouble, well, you know blah, blah, blah. And then we'd go through the business that night, maybe, if they'd had trouble. Why I mean, it was...it was philosophy big time. She was a Home Ec. teacher; she taught us Home Ec., but...and I think they're missing that. But anyway, it's not there anymore.

Ferguson: So, what do you...I think I know what you mean by the philosophy, but for somebody who might be listening to this later who doesn't know what you're talking about. What do you mean by the philosophy?

Wisecup: Okay. Well, like I mentioned, if they had trouble maybe, on travel, or another conversation would come up about almost anything troublesome, or they were having just trouble, you know, adjusting. And we would talk about it, but then eventually we'd go back to the program supervisor. And then we'd have a whole...all of us would be there when the program supervisor or Mr. Jernigan would come in. And then ask questions and just, you know, talk about it. And the Home Ec. teacher was always there. She would relay those things to the staff where you didn't know the students. That part, you understand? But see, this was just over coffee, or what are we going to do today now, or just like you and I are, nonchalant. So, just down to earth that you found out some, well, usually some unhappiness or some problems that would arise.

Ferguson: So, it wasn't just...you weren't there just learning the skills, the cane travel and the Home Ec. skills that you would need. It was also the attitude. Is that fair to say?

Wisecup: Big time! And those of us that got it solid... One time I...probably I'd been there a month two month I don't know, but I was down in the rec room. I haven't been in the rec room. I'll have to see some time when I go down if it's still the... Anyway, a bunch of us were sitting on the davenport, and I forgot something upstairs in my room. So, I

just left my cane underneath the davenport and went upstairs, but it was reported. So, then we had a discussion about that.

Ferguson: Those kinds of things were normal? I mean, just happened all the time?

Wisecup: You weren't supposed to be without your cane.

Ferguson: That's still the case today.

Wisecup: Good! That's right! And I wish they'd do it even afterwards, but some of them don't. But, you know, with some sight, I mean. But anyway, you can't do anything about it after they leave. Oh yes, I wasn't punished or anything nothing like that; just a conversation about it.

Ferguson: Yeah. And who do you remember who had that conversation? I guess, was it one specific teacher that you had interaction with all the time, or was it all of them?

Wisecup: Probably the travel teacher. I don't really remember, because it wasn't a big, big thing. I mean, just I knew that it was, you know, maybe the program supervisor, maybe Manuel Urena at that time. But I had a very good travel teacher, Mr. Witte.

Ferguson: Jim Witte, yes.

Wisecup: Couldn't have been better; made me cry sometimes.

Ferguson: In a “lesson learned” kind of way?

Wisecup: Absolutely.

Ferguson: You don’t seem too upset about it. You seem to appreciate what you learned, even though it made you cry.

Wisecup: True. Well, we were...I didn’t socialize very much, and so we were all supposed to...you know, the only time I ever had a bathing suit is when we did take swimming. We didn’t have to learn to swim but we...anyway, and that was fine. But I really started to say was we also had to play cards. Well, I wasn’t a big card player, you know. I knew Braille and I...to me it was nonsense, where it really wasn’t. So then in the winter time snow, or whatever, we went traveling. And we were sitting in the building playing cards when it was nice weather. I didn’t like that.

Ferguson: You wanted to get out.

Wisecup: Well, should have had travel when the weather was nice, but Mr. Witte didn’t think so. But that’s alright, because when I was in Illinois then and had a blind gal that...she had been up to the Light House up at Chicago. And she carried her folding cane in her purse, and she lived across from the Christian church in Illinois, Mount Sterling, Illinois. And some of her church friends would come and get her to go to church. So, when I came to town it was a different story.

Ferguson: When you went to visit her in Illinois?

Wisecup: No. Well, I lived in Illinois for eight years. And so, one time... Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself.

Ferguson: Was this...you lived in Illinois after the rehabilitation center?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: Okay. Well, let's... I have a few more questions and then we can talk about your...because I do want to hear about that, about some of the other classes at the orientation center. You talked a little bit about travel and Home Ec. Can you talk a little bit more about the apartment setup in Home Ec.?

Wisecup: Okay.

Ferguson: What did that class teach you; because, obviously, there was an entire living space?

Wisecup: Yeah, and I think Carol Clark, she passed away now. And I think we were there three months, but I'm not sure about that time. But it was a long time. I didn't need...well, I needed skills being with other people or socializing, and so see, and she needed to learn to clean house. And so you could have company or do whatever you wanted to in that apartment, the two of you. It was... I'm sorry they ever did away with it.

Ferguson: So did you live in that apartment, or was it specifically just for class?

Wisecup: No, no lived there, but they also had class in it in the day time. But you lived there at night because there were two single beds, you know. And the guys could do that, two guys or two women, you know. And yes, to me it was very... Now, it might have been some reasons that I'm not aware of that they did away with that, you know.

Ferguson: Sure. And I'm not even entirely sure. And you said that both men and women took the class?

Wisecup: At the apartment?

Ferguson: Yeah.

Wisecup: You could if they wanted to, yes.

Ferguson: Did you have many men taking the Home Ec. class?

Wisecup: Yes, but I don't know about living in the apartment; that was two different things, see. And see, the program supervisor usually brought that about. But see, there was a purpose for my being with somebody else, and also for Carol Clark; so the two of us could kind of teach each other. See, they depended on each other as much as staff to help each other.

Ferguson: Pairing up the students, so if somebody had a strength in one area they could help the other. And yeah, that makes sense. And did that work? That system worked for you?

30:00

Wisecup: Oh yes, very good! Oh yes, she and I got along very, very good. Oh yeah, and there were times when I was doing it, but I was told not to do it, you know. She was supposed to, you know.

Ferguson: She needed to learn how to do it herself, yeah.

Wisecup: Oh, I anyway...

Ferguson: Okay, so we covered travel, Home Ec., and you already knew Braille. So did you continue to take Braille while you were there?

Wisecup: Some. And, of course, Mabel Nadding, she could have four or five people around the table reading Braille at the same time. She'd be sitting there knitting. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Oh, that's great!

Wisecup: Oh yes, she could read Braille upside down.

Ferguson: Really?

Wisecup: Oh yes; she was good. And, of course, then she also had writing, Braille writing. And, of course, she taught with a slate and stylus, and of course, the Braille writer. And I did learn Braille, but I learned it by position, and you need to learn Braille by numbers really. But I didn't do that. And you need to learn it by numbers to use a slate and stylus. So then I just...she never did put me on slate and stylus; I just

went to the Braille writer period. I never did use a slate and stylus, which in a way is very valuable. You should have slate and stylus, but in order to read to do it you need to be taught to with the numbers. So then I just went on the Braille writer. And at that time, it was like one hundred dollars and now they're like six hundred dollars, and they're nothing but plastic. And these are very heavy, but it's trying to run a race with me and my age.

Ferguson: I was just going to ask, do you still use Braille today?

Wisecup: Oh yes! Couldn't be without it!

Ferguson: Well good. It's one of the things that's popped up lately. The younger generations, kids now-a-days, they're so used to having books on audio or having a computer, and so Braille is just kind of...it's slowly dwindling away.

Wisecup: I used to...you know the size of the books. I used to read five, six of those a week. Used to; I don't do that anymore because I have some back troubles. But I still do my telephone. I have my own telephone. Well, this one here; this one here is for people up here. I made it up myself.

Ferguson: Oh yeah, you made your own phone book with notecards, yeah.

Wisecup: And then the other one is in just a black note book. I did my own for everybody else, you know.

Ferguson: Do you use Braille to label other things, like in your kitchen or in your clothing? You have tags in your clothing, right. Oh great!

Wisecup: I've done that just the last few years because my head is getting tired of remembering, but it helps me a lot. Oh yeah, I have my tin cans or my vegetables, and I've learned finally in the refrigerator, in the freezer, to put plastic around it and then put a...I got plastic paper that I use; write Braille on and it will stay. And then I put another plastic bag over the top, I mean, so that... I don't think I have any plastic here now. I don't think so. These are...I don't have any plastic here.

Ferguson: Oh, that's okay.

Wisecup: Anyway, it's just clear plastic. Well, it's like this.

Ferguson: Yeah, like the one on your clothing. Yeah.

Wisecup: Right. But then the Braille writer writes that, see. And then, of course, typing. Mr. Kuler was there. He also made me cry at different times, but that's okay. Not too often; once in a while he scolded me, but, you know, sometimes we needed that. And so, then I learned typing and used a, oh well, transcriber thing, because then I had, I finally was... I had some food service work, of course, correspondence work through Mrs. Jernigan from Ames. And also, at the end I went up to...I stayed six weeks in the Commission, because I had six weeks training up in their kitchen. Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself there.

Ferguson: No, that's okay; fine.

Wisecup: Because that was when the Home Ec. was very important to me. They gave me the Home Ec. apartment one weekend, I cleaned her up good. And I invited the supervisor from Methodist. I don't remember how many we had, maybe six, eight, I'm not sure. And I had a student that was there. He was supposed to do the travel after we ate. He was going to do the building.

Ferguson: The tour?

Wisecup: Tour guiding. That's what I was trying to think of; tour guide. And, of course, Manuel Urena thought he needed to be there. And I told him I didn't think he needed to be there, and he fussed about it for two or three days. Finally, I told him there would be a plate; when I came home I told him there would be a plate there. And that was the best thing because then he visited with people, philosophy wise, while I was putting the dinner on the table, see. But he was determined he was going to come, and I didn't want him there. But, of course, I had been told when this was lined up not to have my friends, you know, students. See, I was supposed to... It was an educational thing for Methodists, see. But anyway, he was there. I told him later I was glad he was there, and he...but he stayed with me, and that was fine. But see, I had a hard time seeing then, I mean. But the philosophy is, oh brain washing, but it's the best thing, you know. They have to be tough, but they also are kind and loving, back then anyway. I don't know how it is today. I wish I knew.

Ferguson: It's still the same kind of attitude as far as I see.

Wisecup: Good.

Ferguson: How did you feel about, when you first went into the center, how did you feel about having to use sleep shades all the time? Did that affect you at all?

Wisecup: Not really, because I couldn't see anyway.

Ferguson: Okay.

Wisecup: One time, Mr. Witte, he was coming north from Grand and I was going south down to Grand, and, oh well, I'm sure it was him; positive it was him. Anyway, this guy ran into me, or well, I ran into him, whichever way. And of course, him, you know, "Excuse me," blah, blah, blah. And so, then they went over here, and I went over here, and here he was again. And then he went over here, trying to aggravate me, but he didn't get the job done. But I didn't know it was him.

Ferguson: Yeah, okay.

Wisecup: He was a good teacher; very good teacher. I didn't...maybe it's on recording; might not want to put that. But anyway, I ended up not having to take the five-mile...what is it, five-something.

Ferguson: Oh yeah, the five...yeah, five mile final test.

Wisecup: I didn't have to take that. I had convinced them, you know.

Ferguson: You improved. You didn't need to take it.

Wisecup: Well, they took me up on Sixth Avenue, to a dentist. And I wasn't about to take a cab home, and I walked home. And it was in the winter time, and it was horrible, but I made it. And, of course, when I was going to go up to Methodist... You know, "How are you going to get up there?" Well, there was a travel route up to Methodist; pleasant. We did that all the time. I remember walking up there and back.

Ferguson: So, you kind of did your own impromptu five-mile test all on your own, is what it was.

Wisecup: And they knew that. And, of course, we would... See, along at the fair time in August, the Woman's Club had a big building out at the Iowa State Fair. It's not there anymore, but back then it was. And we took stuff out there, you know, the Braille writer, refrigerators and stuff, and made cookies. Like, we'd come back at night and make cookies to take out, so we'd start to bake the next day. We gave cookies and coffee away ten days of the fair.

Ferguson: Yeah. I've seen several newspaper articles from the Register about the center going out to the state fair.

Wisecup: And many times we walked out and walked back.

Ferguson: Okay that's quite a hike. (Laughter)

Wisecup: Well, the only bad one was there on east 18th there by the dairy. And they, maybe, fixed that now. Well, I walked all over the...

Ferguson: Okay, so clearly you were comfortable with travel by the end of it. Was it at any point really aggravating? Was anything particularly difficult for you?

Wisecup: One time we went out when it was snowy and icy, and so on. Mr. Witte, after we'd been doing Braille and it was nice weather. And we got down to Fourth and Grand and I kind of forgotten there was that slant, and I blew my top to him. Here we were sitting in on the nice days, and then we'd go out like today. But anyway, you know, I survived and he did, too. Oh, he was a good teacher, very good teacher, but kind.

Ferguson: When I talked to a couple of other people they kind of commented that it was hard for them to carry around the white cane at first, simply because they just...they had a hard time accepting that they were blind, or that there was a stigma attached to the cane. Did you experience that at all?

Wisecup: I don't think so. That first month that I went home, and I went to church with my sister up in Boone County. We were two and a half miles from a church, but it was an old church; it's like a hundred and forty-five years old, I think, now. But anyway, it had steps on the outside, probably, I don't know, probably eight, ten to get up to the...and my sister, I usually took her arm. But she could tell right away

that I was much more comfortable using the cane, just in that months' time.

Ferguson: That's great!

Wisecup: And so, no, I felt comfortable with it.

Ferguson: Did you face any stigma from the public in general, I guess, when you were out and about on your travel class, or even after you left the center?

Wisecup: No, not really; airplane travel sometimes, which we had to fight big time for back then. But I don't know that you hear about that much now. But they didn't want us to have it by our seats. They thought they ought to take it from us.

Ferguson: Yeah, I remember that was...I've heard other people talk about that.

Wisecup: Oh yes.

Ferguson: Did you experience that when you were going to the conventions?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: Right. Was this after the center or was this while you were still a student?

Wisecup: Would have, because I went down in a car and came back in a car for my first national convention. No, it was after that.

Ferguson: After that? Okay. One more, quick question about the center before we, kind of, move on. You mentioned grooming class before we started the recording. I, kind of, wanted you to explain grooming class a little bit, because that's...I don't think that's something that they officially still do, though I'm sure that the teachers help.

Wisecup: I wish they did. Anyway, yes, and I didn't want to have the director's wife. Oh, I didn't want to have the director's wife! Oh, and of course, that's who I got. (Laughter) But it was the best thing I ever did. She was a southern gal, Anna Katherine, was precious, precious. She would read something to me or give me... Yeah, she's the one that helped me get to Ames to the service, food service work.

Ferguson: Okay.

Wisecup: And, oh yeah, she helped me a lot because when I came in I was very, very quiet, and very, very shy; very, very quiet, and very shy, for probably, kind of, a reason. I didn't want to get too open with the men when they were...when the mothers were in the hospital, and so on, you know. And, of course, I was third to the oldest. You're supposed to be seen and not heard. So it wasn't all that any...they taught me to... There was a Jim Gashel that lives in Colorado now, and he was a student going to go to college. He was there for the summer, and Ray Halbertson, he's in Utah; I think it is

Idaho, maybe. Anyway, they'd go up and down that stairway at the Commission, and after a while it got to where I knew what they were doing. They were trying to get me to raise my voice. And then I'd be quiet on purpose, you know. Anyway, well, they taught me to scream. (Laughter) Not really! Oh, we had so much fun; it was fun.

Ferguson: So you began to socialize a lot more. I mean, it sounds like the center didn't just teach you those basic skills that you needed, but it taught you more about interacting with other people and getting more comfortable.

Wisecup: And we used to go to the Lion's Club and have to speak and tell them, you know, about the importance of our thing. And I was not a speaker.

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Wisecup: And anyway... And, of course, we had people, different things, come in. When we had the cafeteria we'd have doctors come in, or Lions, or Kiwanis or something. But we'd set the table, and so on, and then somebody would come around and see, maybe, if we did a good enough job, and so on. And that's where we lost the public relation part of it some, when we gave up the cafeteria to cook our meals, and they got away from the public relations part.

Ferguson: Yeah, it definitely sounds like. Especially when you were in the center, it was important for you guys to learn those skills, but more important for you to interact with the public, because it sounds like you were constantly

talking to groups or having visitors come in. And it was as much about public education.

Wisecup: Absolutely! Oh I was...well can I...as my program part went along, I would go...Mrs. Jernigan worked, too. She was with the nursing health department and so many, many, many times he...they would have ten, fifteen legislators in, even on nights, any nights. But I would, maybe, go in the night before, and she would tell me this, and this, and this. Then I should go in, like at two o'clock, three, or whatever and set the table, and so on. And do those kinds of things; they were trying to get me to. But sometimes I would stay when the legislators were there, but when they came I would leave. And when they left, then I go back in and help her clean up, take stuff off the table and put in the dish washer, you know, that type of thing that...I don't know if any...but I did a lot of that. But see, that was working with Mrs. Jernigan. Oh, she was precious to me, precious to me.

Ferguson: Well, good.

Wisecup: Even way back in the National Federation of the Blind, they always wanted people that didn't have money to go. And we washed vegetables, celery and carrots, at the hotels. We would put water in the bath tub and wash our carrots and celery. And we gave out meals, we did; I helped.

Ferguson: Louise Duval, you mentioned her. We talked a little bit about her before this interview. And she gave an oral history and talked about working very, very hard up in the suite at the convention; putting the meals together, washing the dishes.

Wisecup: That's what I mean, yeah, up in the suite, their suite. Yes, oh yes. And it was a number of years, where now the convention has gotten so big. I mean, it costs so much for anybody that doesn't have the money to go, you know.

Ferguson: So you mentioned they wanted people to go even if they didn't have the money. What did they do? How did they get those people to go?

Wisecup: Well, they would pay their ways and then we would feed them pretty much. I was there. I did it, too. What she said was right, indeed. Mrs. Jernigan worked very, very, very hard. Yes, indeed. Then we...he encouraged it. He didn't say you had to, but he encouraged you, because it was cheaper to give out, not eat in the hotel. But you know why that was? White canes out... We were in Houston about in 1970 or '71. And it was...Houston at that time was out in no man's land. There wasn't anything. We had to cross two very, very busy streets, and there was a Pancake House over there. And that's the only thing that was there. And people would watch. We lowans, maybe a few others, but we would go across those two busy streets. And I got to know some people from Virginia. They couldn't see how we ever did it. But, you had a good travel teacher for one thing. And that was the only place to go unless you stayed in the hotel. Well, we didn't have money to, I mean, it's always higher in the...and so we went across there. Different ones talked to us. Sighted people didn't know how we could ever do that.

Ferguson: You had a good travel teacher. You knew how to get around.

Wisecup: Yeah, we did have a good travel teacher, yes indeed. Mr. Witte left and came back, and so on, but he was a good travel teacher, yes indeed!

Ferguson: So let's talk a little bit more about your involvement with the National Federation of the Blind and the convention. I think you told a story before we started recording about how you went to your first convention. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Wisecup: Was very, very special to me. Of course, we got to know, gee, maybe at that time Mr. Jernigan wasn't President; he was Vice President...and I can't say his name now.

Ferguson: tenBroek?

Wisecup: Yeah, tenBroek.

Ferguson: Jacobus tenBroek. I think I pronounced his name right.

Wisecup: tenBroek, yes. But Mr. Jernigan would come in with a lug of cherries. He was just so loving and so kind. You just couldn't help doing what he wanted you to do. But he was with us when I was...as a student, I mean. It was just...I don't remember a whole lot about it, just that part. And the four of us in that room got along real good. And don't really

remember too much. Just that Mr. Jernigan was always, I shouldn't use the word always, but, but mingled with us.

Ferguson: Yes, he was very much part of the students' lives.

Wisecup: Yes, even at the convention. Yes. And of course, forgot what I was going to say. (Laughter) Let's see.

Anyway, unless you want to know more I just don't remember a whole lot about the convention itself. Just that it was because he was there, and he was just with us. And just special to be so close to the big shot. (Laughter)

Ferguson: I was just curious to hear about how you got involved with the conventions, and if it taught you anything, if you enjoyed being part of it, or those kinds of things?

Wisecup: Opened my eyes completely. I couldn't believe, because it was so much of a close, close family. Just, oh I just...all the conventions are... Just that it's bigger now. Oh, I would like to go every year, but my health won't let me unless I take somebody with me, and I can't afford to do that, you know; because my balance isn't real good in a crowd with the elevator. And so, I just can't go. The last two times I went, I had somebody go with me, but I just can't be at all the meetings. I was one that always stayed at the meeting. I was not at night with all the...I wasn't socializing.

Ferguson: Okay. Do you know the meetings, kind of, what they talked about? Were there any big issues that you remember?

Wisecup: Well...

Ferguson: It's okay if you don't.

Wisecup: At the first convention I can't remember the meetings, but most of the meetings were always, back then was with NAC, because of the rehab, you know, they always wanted to tell us blind guys couldn't do anything. And so, NAC was always a big thing to talk about at NAC. And see we went to...we used to go to, whenever we could find out where their meetings were going to be, we used to go to protest different times, and so on, at NAC.

Ferguson: Did you participate in those protests?

Wisecup: A couple of times; and one time when we were in Louisville. Let's see, when was that? Probably been five years ago; I walked for the, "Walk for Freedom." I think it was Louisville, because I think I was in Louisville three or four times. And so, I walked that over and back. And I felt proud about that, I mean. And so tried to participate at our, guess it wouldn't have been a convention. But the National Federation of the Blind used to have information, well, information fairs at the Botanical Center. And we'd take everything, and then have the legislators come just for snacks, and so on. And they kind of wanted me to be at the meeting at the front door. And I really...that was not for me, and everybody wanted me there, naturally, to be important. And I wanted to be back in the kitchen. That was my...so they had us go over there. So we'd mix cookies or bake cookies, and so on. And that was fun. That was, like, one night thing, you know. We did that for a number of years. And of course, then it got to where...and it was hard work,

but it was a very good public relation. Then we got where we couldn't do that anymore. But I've had legislators in my place. I had Mr. Governor Branstad in my place for lunch one time, for a meal one time. See, I learned that through the Jernigan's. They had a lot of legislators in...she would do that. When I was a student they'd do that. And I told you how I used to go to Mrs. Jernigan and help.

Ferguson: Yeah.

Wisecup: Well, and...but sometimes I stayed. There were other students there then, too. That was a good public relation thing then. You'd get to talk about the blindness and get to know the legislators; they'd get to know you. And then when you go up on the hill, so to speak, as we call it. Then you go with your problems. But that was educating to the legislators. That's what we need, to educate them, so we get our money.

Ferguson: Yeah, and you clearly felt that that was a good plan. What Jernigan was doing, it was affective?

Wisecup: Oh it was big time, big time. One time, when I was a student, we went to West Union for the fair, and were there for five days. And Ruth Schrader was sick, so couldn't go. And Mrs. Grannis, the librarian, took a bunch of us up. I don't remember who else; Judy Young, but she's been gone a long time. I don't remember who else, but it was hot; it was hot. We made cookies. And you know, well, the Lions were going to provide for the...for one day, well provide...we used them up in one day, so then we brought our own. But anyway, by Wednesday and Thursday we were getting kind

of grumpy at each other. (Laughter) Mrs. Grannis went on up into Minnesota and came back with Mr. Jernigan, and it was just like you opened a book. Mr. Jernigan came. I'm sure he was tired of whatever meetings he had up there. It was just like a book opened. Mr. Jernigan was here, everybody was happy, everybody...I don't know. I don't remember what he said or anything, but he was here with us, and it just changed. And that time we stayed in Lions' homes; very, very good public relations, you understand?

Ferguson: Yeah.

Wisecup: Yes, we did. I can't remember the students that went.

Ferguson: It's been, yeah. It's been quite a few years, that's okay. But you're getting to the heart of the matter. It's kind of the feeling, even if you don't remember exactly what was said. Clearly there was a feeling that would come up whenever Jernigan entered; or the public education. His plan was very affective.

Wisecup: I have said if he asked us to jump over the moon some of us would have done it! No! We'd have tried! (Laughter) That's kind of crazy, I mean, but yes, that's the affect, yes. Of course, Mrs. Jernigan, to me, was very valuable in all of that. And of course, I had an apartment. They all went to... For the next year was in '65, they all went to California, I think, for the national convention. But I had just got a job at River Side; it's near the river there, River Side Nursing Home. And I was working in the kitchen and had the Braille to put on the trays, and all that kind of thing.

And Mrs. Jernigan had helped me get that job. And also my first apartment was on East 9th and Washington, I think, not sure. But anyway, and then I went over to Calvin Manor and got an apartment over there, because Linda Johnson was leaving an apartment. But they didn't want another blind person in there. And that was kind of an issue. Oh, at that time, oh yes.

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Wisecup: Anyway, I got an upstairs third story up on the outside stair in Beaverdale; and got a job at Calvin Manor in the kitchen with the trays, and so on, and also helped set the table in the dining room. And probably, I don't know how long it was now, three or four months, a change of supervisors. And the new supervisor wasn't about any part of me. It didn't make any difference how hard I tried; no way, no. For the silver wear sometimes, you know, you put the spoon... Anyway, no finger marks on the silver wear when you set the table. And so, the Jell-O, when you'd serve it you'd put your spatula underneath and then you'd kind of...if there was finger marks on that Jell-O, she was very, very fussy. Well, she wanted to get rid of me, period. So anyway, then I went downtown.

Moved down town on 11th and something anyway, well, south of the hospital, and worked at the old post office building with the machines as a hostess, well, from four in the afternoon 'till midnight or 12:30. I don't just remember now, but anyway, the afternoon shift, evening shift because I walked down there and walked back.

Then in '67, the winter of '67, they kind of wanted to do away with the blind guy's cafeteria at the State House. And

so, Mr. Jernigan wanted as many blind guys as he could get floating through that capitol building, helping with the cafeteria, just being there. And so, then I would go because I was on 11th and Grand, I think it was. Anyway, I walked back down to the Commission, and then several of us students would walk out to the capitol and be there. But I'd go from 10 'till 2 and come back then and change clothes, because I had to have, well, I wore a white uniform at the capitol and at the...I can't remember the company at the old post office building, that had the machines. But anyway, I wore a white blouse with a jumper type of thing, their uniforms. And so, walked out there and back every day, and so on, and anyway, 'till April.

Then, I guess, I have to be telling, because I don't talk about this very much. And anyway, well, when I moved from Beaverdale to downtown, I talked to Manuel Urena about getting some people to help. The folks was going to come down with the pick-up, but it was three stories up the steps and they were at the age where they didn't, you know...it was pretty much a furnished apartment. But even then, well, Manuel Urena was getting ready for the state convention speech, and forgot to tell the guys, the students, to come out and help. And so, I called and said, "Well, we've moved," and so on, you know. Well, then he was sorry and it was...I believe it was sincere, because then they did come down and help unload downtown then. Anyway, then I had a meal to say thank you. I just had them come out to eat.

Well, then there was a guy in there that came in in '65. And so, then they... That kind of started a, well, romance, not to my liking but any way. And as time went along, then, why the staff encouraged it big time. And of course, then he was finished up. And he got a job down at Milton, and of

course, they wanted me to go. I said, "No we have to wait a year." I thought he needed to get his feet on the ground, Bill Fuller. Anyway, they kept coaxing and coaxing. And Mrs. Jernigan was out in California, because I think if she'd have been here she and I would have talked about it. She'd have convinced them to wait. But anyway, I finally decided; and so, we went down there for two years, and then to Illinois for two years. He was a blind guy too. And we went to Kirksville then, and two years after that for the summer. And it was on the boards there.

There was an opening at Mount Sterling, Illinois for a high school guidance counselor. So then we were out there, like, eight years, I think. But his brother took us out; the Commission didn't help us do that. His brother come and got us, and took us over there. And he drove up to the sidewalk and he says, "Now, I think their office would probably be when you go inside, on the left. Turn to the left, because there's an air conditioning there." Because he just stayed in the car, see, on purpose. And so, we got out and went in, and yeah, that's where it was. And we got the job, and then we were there eight years. And then they, of course, in Illinois at that time there was a ten-year thing. They had to give you another job, you know. And so... And of course, then I had, well, when we were at Milton, but also then in Illinois, but I had the education for the school board. And see, that's a good way to promote for meals. See, we were just friendly. But see, I got that through Mr. Jernigan having legislators in. See how very, very important that was. And so, then when he come to pick us up, why, he didn't honk the horn. He just, he had the car doors open, so we knew it because he wasn't parked in the same place. But see, we were listening for a sound, and so that then if they were watching us come out.

Anyway, Bill got the job and we were there eight years. And it was a good eight years. He was a good high school guidance counselor. And then they, well, we did anyway, they let him go. And we tried to do what we could about it. We talked to Manuel Urena but he...or not Manuel Urena, Mr. Taylor; he was head of rehab. Because we had moved back in with his folks and left the stuff over there, because it was cheapest rent. So come back in for rehab training and, of course, Mr. Taylor. And I don't think Mr. Jernigan ever knew about it. I kept telling Bill, "I think we need to talk to him." He didn't want to talk to Mr. Jernigan or else there would have been a big fuss over that, because they can't do that to blind guys, really. But anyway, we didn't do that. So, Bill came back and he had terrible hemorrhoids. Anyway, they put him in food service work, and he just hated it. And of course, with his high...you know, that was below college. But he was a good counselor in Illinois, because when we went to get our stuff then, he called over and asked the principal if he would have five, six youngsters come and help. Come down the stairs and, yeah, they were there waiting for him. I didn't go over that time, but they were there waiting. I mean, it wasn't the students is what I'm trying to say.

Ferguson: Yeah.

Wisecup: And the next year later after that, why, a board member's son had graduated and got the job. So, you know what it was all about, but we didn't know it at the time. And of course, that's when I started telling you about this blind gal that was in Illinois.

Ferguson: Yes, I was just going to bring up the Light House, right?

Wisecup: Yes. So she had been up there for training. And anyway, of course, Bill and I, we were just walking. It was a little town, and so on weekends we'd just walked, you know, here and there. Well, people got to talking about those two blind guys with their white canes, so she wanted to get to know us. She was going to use her cane, because if we could do it she could do it, of course. But her husband was very negative about it, so part of... So anyway, and she wanted me to do it. Well, I didn't think I'd be strong enough to do it. You have to be very strong. You got to be hard at times. And of course, Bill had the same travel teacher, Mr. Witte, as I did. And that was what we went for, was his cane travel was big time. And so, he says she has to wait 'till spring.

So spring came early that first year. And of course, then she got blisters because she was wearing not walking shoes. Anyway, and of course, there'd be times... Oh, some places there was just, she called them cow paths, where kids...there would maybe be a house or two where they didn't have sidewalk. There would be a trodden path where they went to school and she couldn't understand that. She just couldn't understand that. And also, another time there was a car parked on the sidewalk. You had to go around. And she'd go 'round, and 'round, and he used a few bad words, and so on. And well, they just decided no more. She wanted another block. See, that's kind of what we've always done. We do that first, the Commission block, and then you stretch out. Well, that's what Bill was having her do, but she wanted to do another block, and he says, "No."

Then she'd talk to me on the phone. I'd hear her story while he was in school and then when, you know, because after school is when they did it in the spring of the year. And so anyway, he says she'll come around, and if she doesn't, then that's her part, you know. And she did come around; she begged. She got different shoes earlier, but she begged. She wanted, you know, and she got to where she could go across the...it was just...it was just stop signs that aren't busy. It was just a small town so they didn't have lights. Bill wanted to go to Quincy with her, but her husband didn't want to. So anyway, we got her to where she could go across the four-way stop thing, because then by that time we had, well, first of all she was on the west side and we were on the east side. So then she and I got to where we would go to coffee. She'd have to walk part way and I'd have to walk part way.

So then one time it was bad snow, and I talked to her on the phone. She wasn't going to be outdoors, of course not. So I knew she'd be home. And of course, we would go out in bad weather. And so, I walked over and knocked on her door, and she about flipped. (Laughter) I says, "But that's the way it always is. You know, you don't stay home just because is bad weather." Anyway, that was...but then another time...and we lived on the south of this main highway. And so, she and Bill had stopped in the day before or something got some slippers for me. I'd had back trouble at that time. And she was supposed to take them down to me, because see, we a lot of times had errands to do on our travel routes. And so, she had to cross that busy street by herself. Anyway, she made it; came down, and I was sitting out on the porch in the swing. I heard her go by. She knew there was an alley, and she had gone by. And finally she

come back click, click, clicking. And I didn't say anything. And she came to the alley; she found me. She found my sidewalk to walk to the house. So then when he came home from school, she thought he was going to go back with her. (Laughter) He said, "I got to go in." And he used a few bad words, maybe, you know. And he had to go in, because he was doing some house work at that time for me. And so, she had to go. And she didn't want to go home. I said, "Well, you'll be okay. You came down here. You'll be fine. You call me when you get home." And she made it fine.

And she wrote a nice long... She wanted to thank us or give us money, you know. And no, no, no we didn't want anything for it. So she wrote a nice long letter to Mr. Jernigan. I wished I still had it, but I don't. Anyway, she missed us when we came back into Iowa big, big time. But anyway, she learned to walk down to the senior citizens. Well, one time my friend was going to go to Navu. So she says, "Why don't you just ride along and I'll take you on over to Mount Sterling to see Dorothy?" So I spent two days with her, two nights with her. And she was the one on Saturday morning, "Are we going to go out and walk with the cane?" And I says, "Well sure, if you want to." Well, she walked down town by herself. Anyway, that's my message about just one of the little things that you can do.

Ferguson: Yeah. No, that's a really neat little story. Okay I was wondering, can you talk a little bit more about, kind of, your work with the NFB? You mentioned going to the state conventions and having problems on the airlines with your white cane. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Wisecup: Well, okay. One time we went up to Minnesota. I think we went to Minnesota two years straight, if I remember. More like in the '80s, maybe, can't just remember. Well, yeah early '80s.

Ferguson: It was about in the 1980s where there was a lot of controversy.

1:15:00

Wisecup: And I went up in the car with Ruth Schrader and some of them. And then, well, at that time Bill was here and he got to know Joe Van Lent. And see, Van Lent was legislative chairman. And of course, our state President, at that time, Peggy Elliot, she didn't want Bill and I... We weren't her friends, really. But anyway, Joe Van Lent said if he couldn't have Bill and Nyla, he wasn't going to be state legislative chairman. So of course, you know... And so, the guys went up on the airplane. Bill and Joe went up to Minnesota on the airplane, because they both had...were working see. And so, oh on the way back...on the way back they got their canes taken away from them. They fought, or they tried, anyway. There was a policeman waiting down here for them when they got off of the airplane. And of course, at that time Laura, Joe Van Lent's wife, well, she wasn't a wife at that time. She was a girlfriend at that time. And so, she was just flabbergasted. And of course, Joe probably would have bent, but, of course, Bill wouldn't bend. And he didn't, of course. Then there was nothing to it at all, just, you know... But they were there, and she was so shocked about it. (Laughter) Oh yes, we had lots of trouble with that; lots of trouble with that, even. Oh yes. Well, I

really can't say because I haven't been now for several years. But you don't hear about it on the Monitor anyway, in our newsletter.

Ferguson: Were you involved with talking to legislators about fixing that behavior?

Wisecup: Oh yes, some, but it was more the airlines actually, see. Yes. See, the Commission for the Blind went in under Human Services and about late '70s. I'm not going to say exactly what year, but the late '70s. And so, then that was when Joe was legislative chairman. And then, of course, by this time Laura and Joe were married.

And of course, then we went all over the state of... We used to go to Fort Dodge, wherever there was going to be a bunch of legislators. We'd go to just to be there. We went lots of places, and getting to know them. And then that's when we had the information fair at the Botanical Center. And of course, that's when Joe and Bill were both out at the front to bring them in. And of course, Joe wanted me to be...thought I needed to be there with Bill. And I, "No, no, no." I'd rather be back in the kitchen part. And of course, there were a lot of them that, maybe, I shouldn't bring this up. But anyway, there were some that were, well, not happy with Bill and I because we were helping Joe. But anyway, there were three or four years we were amateurs. But we finally got it out. Back as Department for the Blind, they wouldn't give us...they wouldn't give us the...which is stupid. But anyway, a bunch of us...

Ferguson: So could you explain why it was important for the Commission to be its own separate agency?

Wisecup: Very, very important. Human Services...the blind guys were at the bottom total. You never could figure out how much money you had, and how much; on, and on, and on. Oh we had been...and some of us had very, very good training, and we hated to see it go by the wayside. And we weren't going to give up 'till we got it back. And we worked hard there three or four years. I sat up at the capitol with a Braille book and they'd say, "Oh are you a staff member?" "No, no. I'm just a student." And then I talked to the legislators or their wives, and little by little, you know, just friendly.

One time, I'll never forget, I don't have any idea what... Well, at that time then Bill was working at the, in the dark room at Methodist Hospital. So he really couldn't... Joe had his own cafeteria at the court house, so he was kind of flexible. And there was something came up, and I had no idea what it was, but I called and told Joe that, no, he needed to come. I couldn't go in and see the Lieutenant Governor. You know, I couldn't do that. He says, "Yes, but you can," because they're going to bring groceries, and he needed to be there for the inventory. He couldn't do it. "You can do it." I finally did do it. And I really don't remember who the Lieutenant Governor was at that time.

But anyway, oh there was times...there were meetings at night. One time Joe and Laura were busy, and Doris and Curtis Willoughby, they're in Colorado now. They were supposed to come and pick us up. Well anyway, we just decided to go home. We were living on east fifth and Des Moines Street at that time. And usually, we'd always go out the west door of the capitol; where that was all closed up because it was like ten, eleven o'clock at night. So we had

to go out the east door. And it was lots and lots of snow. And of course, we finally did get our way up to Grand Avenue. I was dressed for it and Bill wasn't, but anyway; just some of the little obstacles.

Ferguson: Yeah, but that's exactly the kind of stuff that I like to hear about. It's those little stories that really tell you how the work got done. I mean, how you really accomplished getting the...

Wisecup: Well, at the information fairs, like I have said. Well, because Bill or Joe and Laura went to the seminar out in Baltimore, Maryland. And of course, Bill and I wanted to go, but the state president at that time...I'm not sure why the reasons. Anyway, we didn't go; never did go. And I resented that some. But anyway, and she was just not our...

Ferguson: You guys didn't get along.

Wisecup: Yeah. Joe was very insistent that he was going to have us as his helpers, you know. And so, at the information fair, there was some problems about what they were going to do. Anyway, I took my...I use a toaster oven because of my back. I don't twist my back to get into a regular oven much. I do some. Anyway, took the toaster oven. Well, they come along with this conventional oven. Well, I never used one, and they wanted me to use it and I says, "No." Was this two or three days? I says, "I'm not going to do that." I wasn't acquainted with it. That's asking for trouble, if you're not acquainted with it. And I could have been out front, and I just told Joe I didn't want to do that, because Bill and I wanted to...just as a husband and wife wouldn't have

worked good. And I knew that, and so why go through it. And I liked the cooking part anyway, so then I just took my toaster oven and went back and used the oven there. But sometimes they got to where I made lots of cookies. And the years when we'd do that information fair, we had that a number of years. But I would make lots of cookies and take. And they always wondered what kind I was going...I guess, some blind guys...but I love my kitchen. I've always liked my kitchen. Even, I made cookies when I was six and eight-years-old. I remember going to Mom, and she was working in the garden and she'd say, "Two eggs and beat them up real good, and a half a cup of," well, at that time we used lard. And I'd go back and, yes, I'd done those two things. "Well then, you put in some vanilla and a little pinch of salt." Then I'd go back and she'd say, "You've done this, and this, and this?" I was, like eight-years-old when I did that. And then you had to put wooden cobs in and build the fire, you know. So I just have always loved my kitchen. When they take my kitchen away, watch out! (Laughter)

Ferguson: Well, that's good. That's something that keeps you going.

Wisecup: It's therapy work. If you would have been here last week my kitchen was a total mess, because I keep my sugar and flour around. Maybe change that some of these days, but anyway, I put them back in the pantry. All the time I had a mess until yesterday. So, I got it all cleaned up yesterday. Now my cookie door is shut for a few days. Oh, I've got mix, but they don't make as much of a mess.

Ferguson: Okay. So how long were you involved with the NFB? When did you stop really going to the conventions, or are you still involved today at all?

Wisecup: Yeah. Oh yeah. Well, I don't go to the conventions, but I'd sure like to go. My spirit's there physically, not...

Ferguson: Do you have...are there... There's the National Federation of the Blind in Iowa, the NFBI, I know about. Are you involved with that? Do you go to meetings at all?

Wisecup: I already got my ticket for Altoona. I got my room out there already this year. I'm going to, yep. Well, there was a while when I, kind of, quit going; four, six years ago. Just didn't like the things that were going on. And, anyway... And of course, I don't know how you feel or whether you're an NFB member, or whether you're not, or what...

Ferguson: I am not so I...if you're... Are you comfortable talking about why you stopped going? Were there any specific issues that you...?

Wisecup: I'd like to.

Ferguson: Yes, if you're comfortable sharing that, I would like to hear about it.

Wisecup: And, see, I don't remember what year that was, but anyway, when Allen Harris and Curtis and Peggy came into town. And anyway, they wanted a new president. And of course, Peggy was not doing...now as the time going along, I was not a good...but we needed a new...I kept saying we

needed a new president, maybe, but not who they were going to put in. I believed they stacked, well, positively stacked the votes up in Waterloo. I believe we were...and I had not been going very much before that. And I was... Anyway, I'd always paid my dues even if I hadn't been going to the Des Moines chapters. I had, but that year they were going to... We, some of us didn't want Mike Barber in. I'll just be out in the open, because of some of the past, that I've only heard about through gossip. So, I don't know how true it is. It doesn't matter. And also I didn't want him as a president, because he was a staff member also. That's, oh there's a word for that. I can't say it now.

Ferguson: Conflict of interest?

Wisecup: Yes. Yes. But they kept saying anyway, they stacked...there was a couple of guys come from the national convention that year; national office that year. And of course, we had to go up in front and those that weren't going to vote weren't really members, just drivers or so on. They had to go to the back of the room. And the rest of us, then, we were named off who could vote and who couldn't vote. So, of course, it came up I couldn't vote. I says, "You mean to tell me I've been almost a forty-year member of the National Federation of the Blind, and I can't vote today?" I was not happy! So there was a discussion, of course. The guy from... He says, "I don't want to know about the years; I just want to know if you can vote or not." And I was not happy at all!

Ferguson: Did they tell you why you couldn't vote?

Wisecup: Well, they thought I hadn't been...hadn't paid dues, and so on. And I hadn't been going, but I always paid my dues. And we looked into that before I ever went. I went on purpose, because we knew they were stacking the votes. And so, anyway, they had a little conference about it. And well, anyway, I could vote. Well then that night, then Mike Barber calls me and...but he ought to have done it publically in front of everybody...that he was sorry. But see, he had to wait till he got home. And they looked into it. And, you know, but he ought to have done it, but I have forgiven him for... I mean, last year up at our...I went up to the state convention to Mason City last year, and he redeemed himself. Well, see, he left and he went to the other side.

Ferguson: And can you explain what you mean by the other side?

Wisecup: Well, American Council of the Blind. I can't understand why anybody does that. There are others. Look at Slayton. Why, he was there as a student before I was. And I'm sure he thinks he has his reasons, but I cannot understand what reasons he would ever, ever have; but anyway...

Ferguson: Can you explain why you wouldn't ever go to, over to the American Council of the Blind? I guess, why you don't agree with what they do; their philosophy?

1:30:00

Wisecup: Many times, in fact, when even Mr. Slayton was in as Director, he would beg the National Federation of the

Blind to do this, and this. They don't have the guts, if you want to use that terrible word, to stand up for their rights, some of them. I mean, I'm very anti... But it's more of a social group anyway. It's not as it used...it used to be more than it is now. I think now, you know...but wise people, Mr. Jernigan, and why, because I could name some others. Anyway, Mike Barber has redeemed himself last year at the state convention. He's doing quite well, and I think it's on its way up. Their philosophy is different than ours, I believe, now. You disagree, and that's fine.

Ferguson: No, that's fine. I like to hear about the differences of opinion, and understand why somebody might not like one over the other.

Wisecup: Well, they're better than they used to be, but they didn't used to do politics at all. That's very important to us; legislators. We need to know the Lions and so on, anyway...

Ferguson: No, that's fine you can keep talking about it. I mean, it's important for the listeners to really understand both sides of the story and to hear varied opinions. So, it's fine.

Wisecup: Well, I would never go to the other side. (Laughter) And I know a gal that wrote a terrible, terrible letter to Mr. Jernigan. I can't say anything that's in it now, but I heard it at the time. And how they could ever do that is more than I'll ever know, but anyway; each to their own. I think we're doing better as far as getting along than we used to.

Ferguson: You think so?

Wisecup: Yes. And that's what we need to do. And I hope the new director can do...and I think he will. I think he will. I hope so, because blind guys are blind guys, you know. And if you have the same, it's mind boggling. I just can't understand how they could ever go to the other side. But, you know, they have their reasons.

Ferguson: But it's good that you think that the ACB and the NFB are trying to work together now, because that is important.

Wisecup: I really think so, yes. And when Mr. Alan Ackley was here, yes, he... And that's the way it should be, you know; where the director should be for all blind guys absolutely, however it does.

And Mr. Jernigan never really advertised the National Federation of the Blind openly to the students. I guess, indirectly he probably did, but not openly, maybe. But indirectly, probably did.

Ferguson: I was going to ask you if you felt that Jernigan really pushed for the NFB over the ACB. Did he favor one over the other?

Wisecup: Well, I'm sure he did. That's a hard thing to...at that time. That's been forty years ago or better, you know. And I think, maybe, their philosophy is better than it used to be. It used to not be good, I mean...and at all. I mean, at one time there was just a big, big political difference. And, maybe, that's as much as I can really... Well, the program supervisor used to say, you know, "Get out on the barricades

with us.” Well, some people don’t like to do that. Well, even in my own family. I had an older sister. When Bill and I were married she didn’t come to my wedding, because I had the Commission people there. And of course, she has a daughter right now that...she can see some yet, but really doesn’t accept it, and so. And yet, she’s getting lots of things that I didn’t get; electronic stuff, and so on, and so on. But the NFB did a lot of things so that she can have what she has today. So be with us, and thank us. You understand?

Ferguson: Yeah, I get what you’re saying. Yes.

Wisecup: Okay, can I go to another point?

Ferguson: Sure.

Wisecup: I don’t think there’s been very many blind people in Field Operations in the last some years. And I believe that people that go out into the field, they need a driver and a blind guy; blind guys need to talk to blind guys. And I hope that’s changed. And I think it will. I hope it will be. Really, better blind guys trying to tell somebody that’s had, what is it called...generation, or something? What it is that eye problem older people get?

Ferguson: Oh, macular degeneration?

Wisecup: Yeah. It’s better if they talk to a blind guy. Even if sighted people wear sleep shades and go through the training. I don’t know if they...they used to do that.

Ferguson: They still do that, yeah.

Wisecup: Mr. Witte went through California for, I'm not sure, three months, six months. I don't remember now. But see, there's hardly any of them. They're all, out in the field, are sighted guys today; most of them, I think. Maybe there's two blind guys, maybe, not sure. Don't quote me on that. I'm not sure about that there's very few. And you know, give a blind guy a job with a driver, because you just relate better, big time.

Ferguson: Okay. I'm going over my questions. We've kind of, we've covered a lot. So I'm making sure that I haven't forgotten anything. Well, we're on this topic of jobs, employment.

So, do you think that job opportunities have changed for blind lowans over the years? I mean, since you were in the center in the 1960s. Even since then, do you think opportunities have expanded, that you see blind lowans in different kinds of jobs?

Wisecup: Yes. Yes. And see, we need to go back to telling... We kind of got away from public relations, I believe. I really think we have. And we need to get back to more public relations, big time. Yeah, I think so. I think it has improved, yes.

Ferguson: Do you think that there...that blind lowans are getting more jobs that they didn't have before; like in the technology field, or those kind of things?

Wisecup: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes. Another sister, that she has all kinds of stuff. She has a medical supply office,

but she has all kinds of computer stuff, you know, to help her.

Ferguson: Technology?

Wisecup: Yes, because she doesn't see at all, and she uses a cane. My...they're sisters, but anyway, that's the way it is. But see, that's fine. But they still are not NFB members, but yet they're getting what we all fought for forty years ago. But I've set an example. I've not fussed with them too much about it, but my example is still there.

Ferguson: Sure. Sure. Well, you brought up she is doing this job and has help with technology. So, obviously, technology has really changed over the years, especially since you've been involved with the Commission. Can you, maybe, talk a little bit about that?

Wisecup: No, because I'm lost!

Ferguson: Because you're lost? (Laughter) It's just constantly changing so you probably...

Wisecup: I know the mouse and the picture; three things. Other than that, I don't know a darn thing about computers.

Ferguson: Okay, so have you just stayed away from them? You don't care to use them at all?

Wisecup: No, no, no.

Ferguson: Do you know other blind people that use technology, I mean, other than your sister?

Wisecup: Not my sister, my niece.

Ferguson: Sorry, your niece.

Wisecup: Yeah, other blind people. Oh, I'm sure there are a lot, but I don't know them, really.

Ferguson: Okay. Just curious if you think it's a real advantage now-a-days. Obviously, it's working for your niece. It's a huge help.

Wisecup: And I'm glad she has it. It's just the idea that, you know, they're receiving what some of us fought hard for many years ago; is what I'm saying, and so give us thanks. Anyway, I'm not done working on her. I'll see her about a week from Sunday, and I'll bring up...I'm wanting them to go to the state convention, you see. Well, it's at Altoona. So, we'll see.

Ferguson: So you are a library user, correct?

Wisecup: Yes.

Ferguson: Do you... You mentioned that you still read Braille books, but not as much as you used to. Do you get the digital talking book player? Do you use that?

Wisecup: Yes, a lot; like it.

Ferguson: You really like it?

Wisecup: Because I have a next door neighbor. So, I put it right up to my ear at night, because she has her bed right up against my wall. And she's a light sleeper, and so on, and so on. But that's not my problem, but anyway. I try to, and I have head phones, so I try to use those. But anyway, I try to cooperate with her as much as possible. And of course, books aren't as bad as the radio, you know; than TV or the radio. When an advertisement comes on it's always loud. And there's times when I wish my bed was out here, because, see, there's nobody here.

Ferguson: So, how long have you been a library user?

Wisecup: Oh well, since '64.

Ferguson: Since '64, okay. And how has technology changed in the library since '64?

Wisecup: A lot! (Laughter)

Ferguson: I mean how? So, what changes have you seen over the years?

Wisecup: Well, I've gotten too involved with it, actually. Just that I think...Now, what they do, you get a book, a series, you know. But they don't always send you...they'll send you the third and the fourth one instead of the first one, and then the second one and the third one. I like to get the first one and read, you know; but anyway, no big deal.

Ferguson: Well, when you were first a library user did you just check out Braille books, or did you check out...

Wisecup: Some of both.

Ferguson: Some of both? The audio; what did the audio come on? What kind of format was it?

Wisecup: Tapes.

Ferguson: Tapes? Was it cassette tapes?

Wisecup: Yeah. But see, when I was a student they were still using the old open reel.

Ferguson: Yeah, were they?

Wisecup: Oh, yeah. I think the first books that I got were always on tape. I think so. Maybe, the first ones come out on records. Yeah, they come out on records; sure they did. But see, that's been so long ago. Yeah, they come out on records.

Ferguson: And so, you... So you got a couple records, and then you had cassette tapes?

Wisecup: Yeah.

Ferguson: Okay. When did you get your digital player? Do you remember when you started using that?

Wisecup: Two years ago. I'm just guessing.

Ferguson: Up until you got the digital player, did you still get cassette tapes? Is that what you were using?

Wisecup: Oh yeah, the big old players. And they're heavy.

Ferguson: Oh, they are. Yeah, I've held a few.

Wisecup: Oh, I like this other...this is great! Oh, and see, when we used to go on travel...can I go back to that a minute?

Ferguson: Certainly.

Wisecup: When we were students, I don't know how they do now, but they put us in the Braille stacks. And then you were supposed to find your way out.

Ferguson: Yes, they still do that! (Laughter)

Wisecup: Okay.

Ferguson: How was that for you?

Wisecup: Well, one time down here, we got a store room downstairs; it's not a very big room, but I got lost down there. (Laughter) Oh, probably two or three years ago. I just got turned around, and I just laughed about it. I wasn't lost. I mean, just stay cool.

Oh, I used to belong to American Republican Women. And they were going to have a garage sale, and they could even sell cookies or food, you know; garage sale stuff. And

anyway, I went out to Urbandale and had a whole bunch of cookies in my cart; just put newspapers between and, you know. And the gals that were working that day, they didn't know who I was. And they didn't know what to do with me, nor the cookies. (Laughter) The next day, they didn't know it, but the next day I went out with more. But there was some people there that knew me, so we got along okay that day. But it was just a memory for me.

1:45:00

Wisecup: And oh, I went to the Republican Women's stuff. Oh yes, on purpose. I mean, at that time I was strictly a Democrat, but I went to the Repub... Why do you think I did that? Public relations; yeah, I'm a blind guy. Oh, I believe in that completely. Oh, Mr. Jernigan built this thing up from a nothing, but it was legislators that helped us. And they still are best friends; best, best friends, the legislators.

Ferguson: We didn't really talk about, kind of, the different techniques that you use other than Braille. You said that you use Braille to label a bunch of your items in your kitchen. Are there any other kinds of techniques that you can think of, you use to really keep your home clean and well put together?

Wisecup: I told you about my address book for here, and the address book for out in Braille. Oh, my cleaning stuff is always in the bathroom. And my vinegar, and that kind of stuff, is in the pantry. So I know, you know, there's...

Ferguson: You have specific spots for everything so you know where it is.

Wisecup: Yeah. And some of that is marked on purpose, but I have a place for things. I mean, that's the place for them. I may change it eventually, but I put it back in the same place, you know. And that does help a lot. Now, see, I do have a homemaker that they do the washing and run the sweeper. Those two things I don't do very much. I don't care if they don't do...well, then I use their eyes now. When I fixed this up and so on, I do that. And then, maybe, they'll look and say, "Oh, this is gold and that's gold." So then we'll put them together. Or, maybe, I've got one halfway turned and then they'll, you know, fix...I use their eyes now, like for the ads, and so on. But otherwise, I do it yet.

Ferguson: Do you... So you live on your own, but you're in, is it like an assisted living center?

Wisecup: No. We each do our own cooking.

Ferguson: Do you do your own grocery shopping?

Wisecup: No. I used to, but I don't anymore. When I was mugged my life kind of changed. I'm kind of afraid of the world, and so; but used to. We could go to Fairway, if you'd go up with your car in the morning. We got to where they would give us help, shopping help. And that was long before I moved here. And I moved here when I got a divorce from Bill, which I really don't talk about. It was a sad thing. I had to do it for my own...and yet when a man is sick with lung trouble...and so you... But anyway, I don't talk about that

very much because I was very, very sick when I moved here; very fortunate to be here. And I do think it was the right thing to do. However, it was not an easy thing to do. But anyway, we used to go up there to grocery shop, and we could get help from a staff member. But we had the director, or the manager and assistant manager at our place, and they talked to us about it. So, you know.

Ferguson: Well, I wanted to ask, are there any other community activities that you're involved with; like, what you do for fun or for leisure to keep yourself busy.

Wisecup: Go to the thrift store. That's where I get all my clothes. All my junk comes from the thrift store. I love it.

Ferguson: And how do you get there? Do you have somebody drive you, or do you walk?

Wisecup: Yes, I have a Commission senior companion. And she loves it, too. That's my good time.

Ferguson: Okay. And does she...you said that you don't go grocery shopping. So, what do you do?

Wisecup: She and I go; she helps me. But I used to take the bus and go up to Fairway. Oh, I walked from Grand up to Fairway; used to, before I moved here. When I was on East 5th, I would walk up to Fairway and back with a cart. And of course, that's one time when I was on the east side of Second Avenue, going up on past...the bakery used to be there. It's not been there for a long time, but before you got to that bridge they talk about.

Anyway, the Des Moines Electric Company...it was 22 feet back; it was the newspaper. 22 feet back they had dug a hole. They laid down pipes, and there wasn't a barricade around. And of course, I was going up there click-ity click-ity, and all of a sudden I was gone way down deep. I mean, up here, because they put the pipes down out the street. Yeah. And of course, I knew there were pipes...my feet struck pipes. And of course, my Dad used to do that on the farm, water to the barn, and so on. But anyway, yep, and there I was. And of course, the traffic was going, you know; a going, and a going. But of course, there was a great big pile of dirt, but I was on the sidewalk. The dirt wasn't on the sidewalk. But anyway, I finally, don't ask me how because I think I had some help from upstairs, of course. I could have just clawed myself in deeper, but I got out. And, sitting on the big pile of dirt; it was state fair time, 90 some degrees. I was just ringing wet with sweat, kind of crying, I think.

Anyway, some guy went by. So, then he turned around and came back and he talked to me. He said, "Well, I can't help you, but I'll call the police," which he did. And then, the first thing those two guys said to me, you know, asked me where I was from. You know, "What are you doing way up here?" And I said, "I walk all over this town." Joe and I were out on, where the Target store, out there on 35. We were all over this town when they were... Oh, we went to different stuff when the pork people had their convention, or the beef, you know, we went to...all those blind guys, on purpose. Anyway, but I wasn't hurt any.

But I heard a noise across the street, but there wasn't a barricade. Not one barricade the whole 22 feet back off of Second Avenue. Anyway, I didn't, but I sure let Des Moines know. They used to use the bus benches down town for

stopping, you know, barricades; the bus benches. Well, that's confusing to us. So I called and I says, you know, if they don't have any more barricades...well, sure I says, "Well, you guys better be using them, because if anything happened to me again I'm going after them big time." See, I could have got the Iowa Power and Light. And it was a company from Atlanta...Atlantic. And what was the third thing? There were three people involved anyway. I guess, the city, but anyway...I didn't. I just got the medical part. But they wanted it settled right away, but I didn't for two years. But the doctor said, "Don't be in a hurry." But we finally did; just got my medical. And I went through all kinds of medical stuff, because I had back surgery already by that time, not my hip yet, but I'd had back surgery by that time.

Anyway, but it was a scary thing. And it was in the newspaper, yeah. But that would have been about in '82, maybe, I think it was. But, you know, I was unhappy with the police guys. They wondered what I was doing that far from home. And of course, that didn't help me any. (Laughter) Anyway, it was... Nothing happened, I mean, but I have remembered it. Then of course, I knew right away what was wrong... Anyway, when the guys, then that night, they went and, well, I happened to know somebody that delivered things to different people, and sometimes two people. But anyway, he was with the NFB at that time. And so, he had some of his drivers go up there and look. Well, they couldn't find nothing. See, they covered it up right away. So then when Bill came home, Bill and that guy came, and I had to go up. And I said, "I don't want to go." Anyway, I did go with them, and they could tell that the dirt had been filled in. City come and filled it in right away.

Ferguson: So you still attend the convention board meetings right?

Wisecup: At one time I kind of quit, and then I'm back at it, yes; because of Joe, I guess, if anything. Yes, it's very, very important.

Ferguson: Why is it important to you to attend those meetings?

Wisecup: I just like to see, like I said the...I mean, it won't happen, but we just...we had some bad years. And we lost some money last year. And, you know, the director needs to take care of that, don't they; or whoever they have doing the money part. And if they aren't, then the National Federation of the Blind's going to.

Ferguson: Okay. So you attend the meetings just to stay in the loop, and to stay aware of what's going on?

Wisecup: I have nieces and nephews that need the program very badly. I have received it, and there's no reason in the world why they can't if they'll just accept it and do it. You know, I have that one niece that she's fighting, fighting, because she can't see. And her husband helps a lot, and so on, and so on. It's a bunch of nonsense. Her mother was a cook. Her mother was blind, but she cooked for them, and so on. There's no reason why this gal can't. She don't even fix her husband's coffee for breakfast. I mean, come on! But anyway, I just think it is very, very important. You might be able to ma...my dad made a living for the eight kids. And he left my mom; he died in '83, and my mom died in '93. But she

didn't have one bit of problem money wise. He raised eight kids, and it can be done. My mom helped a lot. They both worked very, very hard. And of course, he didn't have the services. And if he'd had services, it would have been much easier and better for both of them. But, back then of course, they didn't have it, you know. And he learned a lot from, well, I...but also from Bill, as far as that goes.

Ferguson: About how to keep doing his work?

Wisecup: Yes. He had a hip replacement when he was about, I'll say 78, I guess; in the fall. And we never expected him to leave the house. And even all winter long, and in the spring, and in the summer my oldest sister, her husband was up there. They liked him. He was a good son-in-law. And he came and helped him out in the yard. Anyway, he got to where he could...he took his walker and a pile of stuff to make fence, and a hammer, and so on, on the other side to weigh it down. He went to the back of his hundred acre retired farm when he was like 82, 83-years-old.

Ferguson: Wow!

Wisecup: I mean, he was determined. I guess that's where I get mine from, maybe.

Ferguson: Well, I just have one last question. Do you have any advice for other blind Iowans today? You kind of touched on bits and pieces throughout our interview, but is there any piece of advice or...?

Wisecup: Go to the Commission. Get your attitude training; that's very, very important! Get the philosophy. It just changes your life completely! Need I say more? I guess, it's been...I'm very, very grateful for what I had. The last 40 years of my life have been very important to me, and even to my friends, and so on, out here. I have the respect of the people, because I get around this building. I go around the outside of the building. There's no place to walk out here; everything's parking as you notice, driveways and parking. But I go around the building and back, and so on, when it's nice weather. I do my exercise walking three times a day right out here in my hallway. And the doctors say I should do that because ours isn't too good. But in the summer time, I need to not get too rusty with the cane. I hope I haven't rattled on too many unimportant things that you...

Ferguson: Oh no, not at all! It's perfectly fine. I really like what you talked about the entire time. So, is there anything else that you'd like to add? We kind of touched on everything a little bit.

Wisecup: Well, and I do enjoy the library service now very, very much. That keeps me going. There is one thing. One time at the state convention, we went on up to Reinbeck, I think it was; northeast Iowa, anyway. And the Lions were going to, again. And of course, we paid for our own supplies, and so on. We were there three days, I think. But we gave out cookies and coffee. You'd be surprised how important that can be, public relations. But it's fun, if you want to make it that way. And, I guess, when Mr. Jernigan come to West Union, he just roped that. (Laughter) You just want to do for Mr. Jernigan. I'm very, very glad, unbelievably glad,

that Mr. Jernigan was there, and I got, you know, in the beginning of the promoting; getting the program built up. It was wide opening to me. I don't know really what more to say.

Ferguson: Okay! Well that's good. That's perfect. Thank you very much for doing this interview.

2:01:41

(End of Interview)

[The following information was later added by Ms. Wisecup: While I was attending the Orientation center, the students and some staff would go up to Boone County to my parents farm (Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wisecup Sr.). We would chop and cut wood for the fireplace in the recreation room. Often times, it could be raining or snowing, or whatever; we would still go. Regardless of the weather, we would have fun and enjoy soup, popcorn, and hot chocolate after a cold day outside. Again, we would travel to the farm to pick a Christmas tree for the recreation room, and enjoy the fireplace.

Soon after I became alumni, current students planned a canoe trip on the Des Moines River, by my parent's farm. The water was really high, but the students required me to go, me being alumni. I went along to help with the picnic at my parent's farm; had relatives visiting from Colorado that couldn't believe that blind people could have so much fun on outings.]

Beverly Tietz

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